Kamijou-san, Two Idiots, Jinnai Shinobu, Gray Pig, and Freedom Award 903, Listen Up! …Fall Asleep and You Die, But Not From the Cold☆

Part 1

(0 Minutes After)

The Intellectual Village of Noukotsu Village was at the pleasant time after dinner. Specifically, it was just before nine at night. A small, black-haired boy named Jinnai Shinobu who would turn six this year was running noisily around a thatch-roof house.

“Nee-chan, Nee-chan!”

“What is it, Shinobu?”

A sexy, black-haired Zashiki Warashi casually wearing a red yukata raised her eyebrows slightly and looked back.

Young Shinobu held something in both hands.

It looked like a stuffed gray pig, but…um, what was it?

“I caught this.”

“Boo. I was caught.”

It was even smaller than Shinobu and it kicked its short legs around as the boy held it from behind.

“Nee-chan, what kind of Youkai is this?”

“Hmm… I’m not sure. It doesn’t look like a Katakirauwa.”

The Zashiki Warashi’s long, silky hair swayed as she tilted her head in confusion. She was supposedly a centuries old Youkai, but her memories and experience were not much help here.

The gray pig tensed all of his limbs and spoke.

“My name is Boo Boo!”

“I already know that.”

The round pig looked like a large soccer ball and young Shinobu buried his face in the back of his head.

“Hmm, he smells a bit like a beast.”

“Of course I do. I’m a beast and proud of it. And you smell like a human. And a bit like milk.”

“Anyway, we’ve got to give you a bath. Mooom!”

Young Shinobu could summon anyone in the Jinnai household if he made a fuss. His mother had her chestnut hair braided and wore intelligent-looking glasses. She was the type that would leave no one disappointed if it suddenly turned out parents day at school was coming up without warning. And as soon as she saw the gray stuffed animal her son was holding…

“Ohh, a new species! I wonder what he eats. Maybe a snack of juicy bacon?”

That would basically be giving pork to a pig, but Boo Boo was unaware of the karmic meal he was being threatened with and cheerfully swung his stumpy limbs around at the thought of being fed.

“That doesn’t matter,” said Shinobu. “Not so many snacks!”

“Oh, why not?”

“They have a lot of salt and it makes you feel bad!”

“Boo. What an adult. Beatrice says things like that sometimes too.”

Meanwhile, Shinobu’s mother did not rush the emergency operation known as “giving Shinobu a bath”. She made the preparations by the book.

While he waited, Shinobu spoke to the Zashiki Warashi who had a 98cm measurement for one part of her anatomy.

“And, Nee-chan, we haven’t done *that* in a while, so let’s do it.”

“That?”

“You know! You have to know what I mean!!”

Still holding the gray pig, Shinobu tackled the Zashiki Warashi’s narrow waist again and again.

And he rubbed his head against her soft side as he explained.

“Let’s do the 1st Sleepless Championship again!!”

“Ugeh!?” groaned the Zashiki Warashi.

Making a basic tsukkomi about not incrementing the number did not matter here. Boo Boo tilted his head while being held.

“What does that mean?”

“Only kids go to sleep early! I’ve decided I’m never going to sleep again!!”

Shinobu was clearly a kid at six, but there was no point in arguing with him here. Everyone judged things from their own viewpoint. Just as the sexy Zashiki Warashi did not see herself as a centuries-old fossilized old hag (virgin), Shinobu did not recognize himself as a little kid.

But that aside, a voice spoke from the large living room TV.

“What? Alcohol? Smoking? If you ask me, sleep deprivation is even worse. Especially for a growing child! Not only does it close off the neural circuits in the brain, but it supposedly shrinks the brain as a whole. I can’t recommend that for anyone who isn’t trying to slowly kill themselves. People will stay up for days on end studying for entrance exams, but how are you supposed to learn anything like that?”

It was the usual fare for TV commentators: a broad interpretation of their personal theory with no guarantee it was true even if they were not lying. However, it packed enough of a punch to shake the Zashiki Warashi to the core.

In her mind, she knew she had to do whatever it took to get that mischievous boy to sleep as soon as possible!!

Part 2

(10 Minutes After)

In her red armor and white miniskirt, Holy Swordswoman Beatrice quietly peeked in through the living room entrance while silently nodding her head.

“Good, good. I can’t deny I’m feeling a little lonely, but it’s just wonderful that Boo Boo is making friends.”

“U-u-um, Beatrice? Don’t we have bigger things to worry about? I mean, something clearly isn’t right. This looks like Japan, but it’s completely different. And isn’t it weird that our equipment, appearances, and personalities are stuck in our Ground’s Nir forms even though we’re back on Earth? Plus, everyone can understand each other no matter what language we’re speaking. I feel like space-time has fallen into a Klein bottle…”

White Witch Filinion the glasses cow was the one raining on Beatrice’s parade. She was a plump woman wearing a knit sweater, shorts, cape, and witch’s hat. The airheaded young woman gave off a thick, unhealthy-looking allure that made one think that licking her anywhere would be like eating pure butter.

And if the Holy Swordswoman and White Witch of the level cap group were there, another was sure to be with them. The third member wore a green priest’s outfit with slits more shocking than a China dress on either side of the tight skirt, rising even higher than the base of her thighs. She could not use any healing magic at all and a certain part of her body could not be described too much to preserve her privacy, but to give a vague hint, it was her chest! Yes, that singularly flaaaat chest belonged to Fighter Priest Armelina.

“Ahh… But this place is so relaxing. A futon is so much better than a bed. My parents make tatami mats, so I have a weakness for this soft rush smell.”

As Armelina’s body temperature began to comfortably rise and her head swayed back and forth, the spiky-haired high school boy named Kamjiou Touma gloomily hung his head a short distance away.

“Hi, everyone. It’s your favorite lightning rod of misfortune, Kamijou Touma. …What happened this time? This obviously isn’t Academy City and, since I was in the middle of washing the dishes, the water is still running back home!!”

“More importantly, Touma, we need to investigate the mysterious phenomenon that happened to me. Yes, I had just opened the pudding cup and was about to stick my spoon in when I was transported through space and time!”

“Shut up! Dammit, goddamn fucking nun baby!!”

“(J-jump!?)”

“If you’re going to join the conversation, then give some exposition about yourself! It’s only polite!! There’s plenty you could describe: your white habit, your long and straight silver hair, your hopeless chest that’s just sad to look a-bogyorwaheh!?”

Just as he started lecturing the nun in front of him, the Princess in her special suit kicked him in the butt, Armelina’s metal staff flew toward him, Misaka Mikoto launched a lightning spear, and Aika gave the go sign to the five meter white liger (an unnatural combination of a lion and white tiger) that she used as a couch. For some reason, the powerful feline received more of an explanation than the #3 in a high class girl’s school uniform or the shut-in in a white and green striped bikini.

“Kh. Why don’t I feel awful after being dragged out of my shut-in paradise? This is my first time here, so why does this mysterious Japanese house feel like home?”

Quenser, Heivia, Lu Niang Lan, and Shiroyama Kyousuke were also there, but they were all guys or old women, so they did not matter.

Except…

“I feel like I’m forgetting something I can’t afford to forget.”

The spiky-haired boy was always lamenting his misfortune, but it was Shiroyama Kyousuke who had truly been born under an unlucky star.

“When something weird happens to me, there’s no way that unimaginably evil and blinding whiteness isn’t involved. Heh heh. Heh hah heh! Ah ha ha ha ha ha, goddammit!!”

The boy was overcome by fits of laughter, so everyone naturally kept their distance.

“Ahh, we’re nice and clean now.”

“Squeal… When I get too warm, my nose gets wet and my head feels like it’s boiling…”

Young Shinobu had steam rising from his head as he walked in with the gray pig after their bath.

He must have been moisturized, brushed, and detoxed with some kind of beauty treatment because Boo Boo was glossier than before. Then Shinobu held him close and spoke.

“Okay, time to explain the rules!!”

Things were not looking good. Everyone gathered around 6-year-old Shinobu and sat down to listen.

“For the 1st Sleepless Championship, you can’t sleep! Sleep and you lose! That’s all!!”

“That was fast!”

“And what do you mean by ‘sleep’? I’m seeing a lot of nice racks around here, so are we talking about that sort of-…agwah!?”

Quenser gave a basic response and Heivia took it needlessly far, so the Zashiki Warashi in a red yukata kneed the second boy in the solar plexus, karate chopped the side of his neck when he doubled over, and then made a sharp curving punch into his ribs.

The 6-year-old looked the pig in the eye.

“That sort of?”

“Squeal?”

Beatrice prepared to say it was nothing to worry about with an archaic smile on her face, but…

“If you don’t know something, just ask Beatrice! Beatrice is smart and will tell you anything you want to know!! Heh heh!!”

“No, don’t ask about this! Kh, but when I see Boo Boo that proud of me, I don’t want to say I don’t know!!”

Despite the confusion, they began discussing the details.

Kamijou raised his hand first.

“How do we determine the Sleepless Champion? Do we all get in some futons?”

“Climbing in a futon as soon as the sun goes down is what a kid does!! …Gramps said real gentlemen and ladies stay up late.”

So he caused this, thought the Zashiki Warashi while making mental note of it for later.

“So we can walk around all we want, huh?” asked Mikoto while placing her index finger against her slender chin.

“But you can’t go outside!” Young Shinobu puffed out his cheeks. “You can’t go out to play after taking a bath. Only kids catch cold like that!!”

“Hmm. So basically, we have to fight our drowsiness inside the house? Don’t underestimate a shut-in’s ability to stay up late, little boy.”

Aika summed it up in her striped bikini, but Lu Niang Lan, the beauty in a red modified China dress, looked puzzled.

“But why bother going along with this?”

“Yeah, I’m already feeling sleepy. Yawwwwn… I think being transported through space-time is even more of a burden on your body than jetlag. My head already hurts like I’ve been up 24 hours.”

The White Witch curled up on the spot even though the hallway’s amber-colored flooring was wood. She was so very self-indulgent and defenseless. The opposite sex might have felt their heart pounding at the careless and airheaded allure, but the Holy Swordswoman and Fighter Priest of the same sex only felt irritated. They wanted to kick her.

And everyone had the same thought.

The people who refused to participate in these unreasonable “games” tended to be used as an example, so what kind of “graveyard” did the 6-year-old have prepared for this solid situation? This cow would tell them.

“Munyah?”

Then it happened.

A soft white cloth wrapped around Filinion's right ankle. But they could not see the other end. It extended endlessly into the distance.

A white cloth.

White.

Queen.

And…

"W-w-w-w-wait! What's happening!? Beatrice, where is this dragging me off to…!?"

Filinion pointlessly reached out her hands in confusion as she was dragged away by the ankle, but she had no idea she looked like she was being captured by a strange body-snatching alien from the '80s.

Then Shinobu spoke.

"Oh, the forbidden room is down that way."

With that ominous piece of trivia, Filinion vanished around a hallway corner.

They heard a door open and then close.

But then…

"Ngwaaaahh!? Abah, abababaha! Wh-what the hell!? It's so white! What is this white amorphous mass!? I'm…wait, I'm…!!!???"

"Hee hee hee. Ah ha ha. You can't escape now, brother. There are no morals, standards, or justice here. Just like an anemone captures a small fish or a pitcher plant melts and consumes a trapped fly, I'm going to sweeeetly dissolve you and make you mine."

"Eek! What is this twintails from hell!? Stop, wait! You aren't just holding me down! This is direct pressu-…adbchabergeh!!!???"

"Tch. Now that I look closer, this is a blonde and busty woman. You don't look like my brother at all."

After the sound of something being spat out, something slid out from the hallway corner. The object symbolized a certain individual and it had been wadded up like a used tissue. It was a pair of glasses with the lenses broken and the part that rests on the nose

bent at a right angle.

Quenser's features were emphasized like a flashlight was shining up at him.

"H-how do you even do that to glasses!? It wouldn't get that bad even after ten thousand adorable glasses tricks like searching for your glasses when they were on your forehead, looking up at someone above the glasses instead of through the lenses, or getting white cream all over the lenses when trying to cook! Gulp…!!"

Kyousuke looked even more depressed than before and gave the most accurate advice.

"That is the truly evil peak of the Unexplored-class lurking beyond the gods. Merely viewing that truth will drive you mad, so do you really want to search it out for yourself? You'll end up like that person who lost her glasses and lenses."

No one could respond to that.

No one wanted that empty title. There was no obligation or sympathy here.

While they did not understand the details, some kind of white darkness filled the forbidden room. It was like summoning a black hole that existed solely to crush people's bodies. Young Shinobu had a way of drawing in nonhumans, so he had set this up, baited the hook with Kyousuke, and shaken the fishing pole. So what would happen now? They had just received a terrifying demonstration. They did not dare even ask what had happened to the White Witch.

There was one thing they knew for sure.

Fall sleep and they died.

So let the championship begin☆!

Part 3

(3 Hours After)

The initial impact had been far too shocking, but there was still a challenge to overcome.

At three hours from the beginning, it was midnight. And that felt to them like 24 hours + 3 hours.

And in the tea room…

“Squeal. I’m feeling sleepy.”

“Hm? Well, that’s not too surprising. It might be time for kids to go to sleep.”

“No! I’m old enough to gather plants all on my own. I can tell which ones are poisonous and the elder said being able to get your own food is proof you’re an adult.”

Young Shinobu and the gray pig rolled around on the tatami mats as they chatted. There was no futon there and they were using a cushion folded in half like a pillow.

And the Zashiki Warashi in a red yukata and Beatrice with her red and silver hair had the exact same thought.

They wanted to let Shinobu and Boo Boo sleep.

But those two would be dragged into the forbidden room if they fell asleep, so what were they to do?

“Armelina.”

“What’s with that look, Beatrice?”

“Sorry.”

A strange shout of “Dwah!” burst out. The Holy Swordswoman had drawn her rapier (which was technically a Magic management device known as a Shining Weapon), fire had burned from the tip, and she had not hesitated to jab it into Armelina’s gut. The Fighter Priest would not normally be so easily defeated, but she had not expected an attack from her friend during this Sleepless Championship where a futon was the enemy.

This was where it began.

They had skipped right past fighting over coffee or mint gum or messing with the air conditioner to make their rivals more

comfortable.

There was something wrong with these battle types.

“Y-you…idiot…?”

“Sorry, Armelina.” Beatrice did not look remotely remorseful. “But Boo Boo isn’t going to last. This championship should end if everyone else drops out, so if putting everyone else to sleep will save him, I’m not going to even think about surviving along with him!!”

“Dammit! Stop acting like a yandere when you’re single! And does falling unconscious even count as falling aslee- gbrchi!!!?”

The trick was to keep the attacks coming before her opponent could physically or mentally recover. After a few more hits to the belly, the young woman passed out like a princess being kidnapped by sleazy bandits. Armelina had a one way ticket to the graveyard. A white cloth wrapped around her ankle and she was dragged away with her metal staff scraping against the tatami mats.

At the same time, the Zashiki Warashi kicked over Hayabusa, a normal member of the Jinnai family (and a delinquent high school boy) who had been sleeping like normal. She heard some desperate screaming, but it was all for young Shinobu’s sake.

“Wait, wait, wait. What’s the point of sacrificing people who aren’t even part of the championship?”

“Oh? Um…well, it’s only Hayabusa.”

Those hunters of love readily hunted down other people if it would protect the person they loved or needed to protect. They left the tea room in search of new prey, but then the situation grew even more confusing.

“…Zzz.”

“Boo. He started this, but he’s already asleep.”

“N-nooo!! Shinobuuuu!?”

In a way, this was to be expected since the time after midnight was like another world for a 6-year-old, but that was not the most interesting part. Shinobu was sleeping with the gray pig in his arms,

but the white ribbons of insanity did not attack him like they had Filinion and Armelina.

A voice from the forbidden room explained why.

“Mutter, mutter… Hmm, after getting two or three sandbags in such quick succession, I’m feeling sleepy. Zzz.”

Part 4

(5 Hours After)

What the hell?

Everyone had that same thought. The rules were almost meaningless in this championship. Did it all come down to whatever the White Queen felt like at the moment!? She had decided to punish the losers for whatever reason, but how was their host Shinobu (6 years old) supposed to stop her if she stopped following the rules?

They all shuddered at that frightening thought, but could they really shake those all-powerful white shoulders to wake her up and tell her to take this seriously? And it was true this had saved someone.

“Ah!? …Huh? I fell asleep?”

“Shinobu. I’m not sure why, but it didn’t count. You’re fine.”

Meanwhile…

Quenser and Heivia had ventured out into the Jinnai house’s front yard. Why? Because the Japanese-style house had too many futons. They had decided playing on the hard dirt outside would help fight off their drowsiness. However, they had to stay in the yard. The fence was an impassable barrier.

“If we even nod off, a white hell awaits us. There’s no way I’m breaking any of the rules. We can’t set foot outside the yard.”

“Not even our busty commander punishes people this harshly. What

the hell are we supposed to do?"

But it was the dead of night when even the trees slept. It was 2 AM when someone made their next move.

It began with Kamijou Touma exploring the late-night home. He took on the role of everyone's leader. If a girl was in trouble, he was there in a flash. He was worried about what had happened to Filinion and Armelina (Wait, what about the Hayabusa boy?), so he tried crawling toward the forbidden room despite the danger.

He arrived there more easily than expected, but that was why he felt so puzzled as he grabbed the sliding door's handle. It was not locked, so he slowly slid it open.

And he screamed.

"Gyaaaaah!?"

The others kept their difference because they assumed it was a trap, but trustworthy Index and Mikoto ran over.

"Uuh… What is it, Touma? I'm so tired."

"And the normal family members are sleeping, so be more consid-… eh? What is this!?"

There was nothing there.

Nothing at all.

Not only was there no sign of Filinion or Armelina, but the white disaster that had attacked them was missing. The room was full of old furniture, and there was no room for anyone to hide.

"Eh? But…eh?"

Kamijou had discovered it first and he was the most confused.

"Then…where did the person here go?"

The answer was obvious.

If the White Queen had ignored the rules to leave her post, it was obvious where she would go.

"…Broootherrr…"

They heard a creaking from the dark hallway. A silhouette's head swayed gently back and forth while a dull voice escaped its lips.

"Mumble, mumble… Broootherrr…Zzz."

In the guest room one sliding screen away, a moonlit silhouette could be seen sitting with his back to the wall. Shiroyama Kyousuke had his hands pressed to his mouth to make sure no sound escaped, but he could not stop his entire body from trembling.

He was silently complaining about the unreasonable scene unfolding before his eyes.

(Does it no longer matter if I'm asleep or not!? She just wants to grab me and crush my body with her vise-like strength!!)

But lamenting was not going to fix anything. The White Queen was not a genius at analyzing the rules and using them to her advantage. She used her own power to plow through everything in her way and her incredible charisma ensured the world would change its rules to fit after the fact. If she decided something was so, it was so. That was the simplest introduction to the world Kyousuke knew.

With his hands over his mouth, he glanced over to Aika and Lu Niang Lan and signaled with his eyes.

A summoner could not summon an otherworldly Material without a vessel, so he had to secure himself a vessel. But…

"(No. The liger is my vessel, so I can't let you have her so easily.)" (Aika)

"(I started down the path of an assassin because I was sick of being a vessel, remember?)" (Lu Niang Lan)

They had their individual excuses, but it came down to one main issue: Throw me in front of that unbeatable nemesis and I'll die. If you want to die, do it on your own.

"A-aren't you being a little too cruel?"

Kyousuke began to protest, but he had forgotten a more fundamental issue. What would happen if he carelessly opened his mouth when he was supposed to remain entirely silent?

Something broke through every last panel of the sliding screen behind him.

It was a large number of white ribbons. Resistance was futile at this point. Those fragments of the Queen wrapped around him and he could no longer escape her grasp. He was dragged toward the tatters of the sliding screen and he vanished from the guest room.

“Mutter… Hee hee hee. Hee hee hee hee hee. This flavor…this smell…yes, yes…there’s no mistaking it this time☆ Broootherrrrr!!!!!!!”

“Ohhhhn! Ohhhhhhohhhhhhhhhhohhhhn!! Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhn!!”

Some kind of otherworldly screaming burst out, he was stuffed into the forbidden room, and no one dared to move.

Kamijou covered his eyes with trembling hands as he silently watched from around a corner.

“I didn’t…save him… I’m so stupid! I’m a coward! He was right there!!”

Mikoto placed a hand on his shoulder and silently shook her head.

“Don’t call yourself stupid. You know you couldn’t stand up to that.”

“His noble sacrifice kept the world safe.”

That was true.

The White Queen had been after Shiroyama Kyousuke from the beginning. The glasses cow and the flaaaat young woman had only been a tragic accident. Now that she had accomplished her goal, wouldn’t the White Queen step down and allow young Shinobu’s 1st Sleepless Championship to resume safely?

Just as that faint hope rose in their hearts…

“Ah!?”

The White Queen’s shoulders jumped slightly as she woke up in the center of the hallway. That insane silver twintail girl slowly looked around, so everyone ducked their heads out of sight.

“I was having such a wonderful dream. Oh, but I can dream whenever I want. Right now I need to find my real brother. Broootherrr.”

“(D-don’t tell me!?)”

Kamijou shuddered as a singsong voice reached his ears.

“Broootherrr, where arrre you? Ee hee hee. Come out, come out, wherever you arrre. Hee hee hee…”

“(Sh-she doesn’t realize what she did!? She doesn’t even have a clue!?)”

“(Yeah, we can never let that Shiroyama guy know about this.)”

After showing off how hopelessly outmatched the others were, the Queen cheerfully returned to the forbidden room.

The game would continue.

Part 5

(7 Hours After)

It was 5 AM and the morning sun was rising. They were only seven hours in, but since everyone had already spent a full day in their original worlds, it felt more like 24 hours + 7 hours. The survivors felt like they had passed some kind of turning point, but they would collapse as soon as they let their guard down. The hardest part was yet to come. The early morning was the real challenge.

“Sigh…”

Young Shinobu and the gray pig turned his sparkling eyes toward the orange color outside the window. This was an unprecedented legend for them, so they may have seen it like reaching the South Pole.

“It’s not dark anymore. Yeah, I won’t be afraid going to the bathroom now!”

Shinobu trotted from the guest room, across the tea room, and toward the bathroom. The Zashiki Warashi sighed. He had only fallen asleep for a bit, but that pit stop seemed to have helped a lot.

Meanwhile, the others were approaching their limit.

Quenser's group had fled the comfortable indoors to drive away sleep with the dirt yard. The basic idea was fine, but distancing themselves from the others had cut off any communication with those others. The dull flow of time was eating away at their psyches.

Quenser slowly raised his hands.

"Next topic: name a perverted noble."

"Zzz."

"C'mon, you need to answer, Princess! Oh, shit, she's fast asleep!"

A white smile flashed through the two idiots' minds. They went around slaying the monstrous 50m weapons that had ended the nuclear age, but there was nothing they could do against that mass of coquettishness.

That left only one way out of this.

"Take this!"

"Ahhh!? What the hell are you doing, Quenser!?"

In front of his shocked friend, the student began messing with the defenseless face of the sleeping teenage girl. Specifically, he pulled out a marker and drew new eyeballs on top of her cutely shut eyelids.

A bunch of white cloth had started leaving the house, but it all stopped. It flipped back and forth like a kitten's tail as it approached a new toy, but it finally drew back inside.

Their Queen seemed to enjoy clichés.

"Phew…"

"Wait, wait, wait. If that's good enough to fool her, I'm done taking this so seriously! I'll just put on this eye mask with eyes drawn on it. Fweh heh heh. Wake me when it's all ov-…"

With a sound of something bursting through the air, Heivia doubled over…no, that was only his afterimage. The actual boy was probably already in the house. A dreadful sound rarely heard even on the battlefield came from the forbidden room. A scene straight out of “Never to be Replayed! Records of Tragic Wars ~The Footsteps of Battlefield Cameraman Sewax~” faded and vanished.

Quenser trembled and yelled a complaint.

“What counts as a cliché and what counts as surreal to her!?”

The gloomy hoodie rabbit boy was probably the only one in the world who knew where she would draw the line, but he had already been taken out. Quenser felt like the terrorist with the code to disarm the time bomb had committed suicide.

But the normal part of the Jinnai family began to stir as the sun rose. First, the elderly grandmother opened all the rain shutters and the grandfather yawned while grabbing the newspaper out front. After a little more time, the mother and father left their bedroom.

“Yawn, morning Shinobu. Hm, I don’t see Hayabusa-kun anywhere.”

“Don’t worry. He was reincarnated in a world of swords and magic, so he’ll be fine. I bet he’s having the time of his life with a bunch of 14-year-olds following him around.”

“Did Shinobu really stay up all night? You can’t let him do that. Aren’t you his Nee-chan? C’mon, let’s get him in his futon.”

“W-we can’t! That’s too dangerous!!”

The sexy Zashiki Warashi struggled to take back 6-year-old Shinobu (Equipped: Gray Pig). This was Shinobu’s greatest challenge yet. A mother was too great a temptation for a 6-year-old. Even without a futon or pillow, he might pass out if she just lay him down and patted his stomach.

But Shinobu’s mother tossed in another unexpected bombshell.

“Okay, time to make breakfast! I don’t want to make him nocturnal, but I bet he’ll fall right asleep if his stomach is full!!”

The Zashiki Warashi was a Youkai that predicted the fortune of the family she had been drawn to and a strange vision came to mind in

that instant.

Jinnai Shinobu. Probability of Death: 100%.

She then fully activated the Hyakki Yakou Prototype Ver. 39 Zashiki Warashi. If you aren't quite sure what that is, you can just think of her as a pretty damn amazing Zashiki Warashi!

She tried to avoid Shinobu's death by using that power to manipulate the entire world's destiny, but…

(You're kidding. I'm distorting the entire universe's destiny and that white thing isn't even budging!?)

You can just think of her as a pretty damn amazing White Queen!! Nothing could be done about her, so the Zashiki Warashi decided to focus on something other than the root cause. It was all over if Shinobu and the White Queen came into contact, but that just meant she had to put someone else in his place before that happened.

"Hmm, hmm." She thought for a while as she looked around. "Well, he should work. He seems used to misfortune, so he'll make an easy scapegoat."

"Gnyahhhh!?"

Before even eating dinner, Shinobu had entered the kitchen and been given one of the wieners meant to go with the fried eggs, but he was already starting to snooze. Meanwhile, a spiky-haired boy screamed from the guest room.

Now each of the groups had sacrificed someone and no one would escape unharmed.

Then Misaka Mikoto's eyes suddenly clouded over with despair.

"I don't know what happened, but someone must have done something. Doryah! Confess to your crime or I'll blast you all with my Railgun!!"

"Your guy gets taken out and you do this!? Aren't you a little too dependent on him!?"

Quenser's loose tongue won him the honor of being the first target.

"So it was you!?"

“Ah…!?”

With a deafening explosive roar, someone passed out in the yard. Since he was unconscious, the White Queen left the forbidden room and dragged him away.

The Princess was still standing perfectly still and breathing steadily with eyes drawn on her eyelids with marker, so she did not see any of it.

“Phew.”

You might have forgotten by this point, but there were two ways of overcoming this.

It was a championship.

To survive, one could either avoid sleeping or put the others to sleep.

“You could learn a thing or two about love. People are willing to throw out everything else for someone they care about.”

The sexy Zashiki Warashi was being a lot more active than usual. As her long black hair swayed behind her, she tried to sound cool, but that proved a poor decision.

It happened so quickly one could only assume she had stolen time itself.

At some point, the smiling White Queen had grabbed the Zashiki Warashi’s hands from right in front of her.

She smiled (from really close up!!) and nodded deeply as if she had found a kindred spirit.

“I understand completely!! If you love someone, it’s worth destroying a world or two or a history or two, isn’t it!? You appear to be wearing red, but I can smell a similar whiteness hidden inside you! I think we can get along quite well!!”

“Ah.”

Far be it from me to interrupt Her Majesty the Queen’s excitement, but what happened in the championship when someone was “caught” by her?

Something was thrown into the forbidden room.

Then Beatrice bit her lip in silent thought.

(Th-that was close! I just about agreed with her!)

But now the protection of the sexy and busty Nee-chan Zashiki Warashi was gone. Shinobu would likely be the next victim now. In a way, the entire "world" of the Jinnai house was his ally, but sadly the normal people would try to help by putting the young boy to bed.

And Beatrice's top priority was Boo Boo. The situation was hopeless, but that round stuffed animal was adorable enough for her to want to stop time. And enough for her to fall into the thought patterns of a great demon king who would sacrifice everything else for him.

However…

"Boo! What's this? I've never tasted anything so good!!"

"It's a fried egg. There are countless variations in flavor depending on what you sprinkle on top."

"What's the difference between Worcestershire sauce and soy sauce? They're both black!"

"But a real con-oh-sewer eats it with salt and pepper. Come with me! If we get in line first, we get ours first!"

(Ahhh!! If he wasn't Boo Boo's friend, I could have abandoned him to his fate!!)

Beatrice tore at her hair with one hand and sighed. She sounded cool enough, but she had entirely forgotten that it was her who had personally sent Armelina to the graveyard even though that young woman was Boo Boo's friend.

Besides, was there anything she could do to protect them?

Beatrice's ahoge lit on fire and swayed as she walked elsewhere.

"There's a lot fewer of us now, so let's settle this. I'll start with you, Miss Modified China Dress!!"

"Tch. You managed to lock onto me while I was hiding my

presence? And you really are consistent in how you deal with things. I can respect that in a way. But you really are a silly young girl if you think you can lay a hand on the Perfect Dragon who slayed a summoner!”

Lu Niang Lan’s anger flared up, but Beatrice wagged her index finger at her.

“Pay attention to who’s left, foolish woman. Notice anything in common?”

“Hm? N-no, wait…!?”

Aika (←Small)

Misaka Mikoto (←Small)

Index (←Small)

Beatrice (←Target of bullying)

Princess (←Said to have decent size, but does she really?)

Jinnai Shinobu (←Not the issue here)

Boo Boo (←Ditto)

Lu Niang Lan (←Warning! The only one with giant breasts)

People had one of two reactions when they saw something they lacked: aspiration or hatred!

“Tchhh! Wh-when did I end up in the out group!?”

“Looks like you’ve finally realized how much hate you’ve accumulated. Now go to hell and let those lumps of fat crush you under their weight! Attack, attack! Cut down the outsider!!”

No one was stronger than Lu Niang Lan in pure martial arts, but she would not fare so well when the battle girls of other worlds rushed at her from every direction.

Something had gone horribly wrong from the moment Kamijou Touma and Shiroyama Kyousuke were taken out so quickly. There was no salvation left in this world. They all attacked the main dish: the modified China dress. The grudges of girls who had long been mockingly called “small” were frightening indeed. They sent her to

the graveyard like a swarm of piranhas.

Then the flat-chested criminals wiped the sweat from their brow and discussed what to do next.

“I feel like we can work together now. Why not join forces and try to fight the White Queen?”

“Come to think of it, that Queen was pretty big herself. I’m all for this one.”

(Hmm, maybe I shouldn’t have done that to Miss Flaaat.)

She could only pray for Armelina’s peace in the afterlife.

Part 6

(10 Hours After)

It was 8 AM and breakfast was over. The survivors had made it through the second challenge of the morning by politely turning down the breakfast made from delicious-looking Intellectual Village ingredients.

Beatrice and Aika were discussing something.

“Sorry, but I think either Index or Misaka Mikoto will drop out next.”

“Yeah, they are the only group with two girls left. And eating will lead straight to falling asleep and dying, but that white nun couldn’t resist the temptation and ate her fill.”

What had happened to working together? Those two were already making ominous predictions, but the sad parting came from elsewhere.

“Ah, ahhhh!? Liger!!”

“Yeah. Don’t felines spend 20 hours a day dozing off? They barely ever fall fast asleep, though.”

“Ahhhh!”

Aika lamented as the 5 meter loser was dragged into the forbidden room by a bunch of white ribbons. Farewell, white liger. Go with pride.

Now that mealtime was over, the Jinnai household began cleaning and laundry. Boo Boo was being chased around by the vacuum cleaner that Shinobu's mother was using.

"Boo! What is this loud thing? It isn't going to explode, is it!?"

"Hm? That's a vacuum cleaner. It's a magic box that sucks anything up. Look, it's gonna suck up your big head, little piggy."

"Ahh, ahhh!?"

The nozzle began sucking at his forehead. He seemed to be having fun, but Beatrice worried he would start feeling sleepy. Once the excitement wore off, he could fall sleep in the blink of an eye.

But…

(How exactly are we supposed to defeat that Queen?)

If she managed to answer that extremely difficult problem, she could end an entire series right here, but standing around was not going to help anything. They would eventually fall asleep and the white would get them.

"Vweeeen…"

Young Shinobu spread his arms and made airplane noises as he ran across the tea room to the veranda. Boo Boo was curious, so he left the vacuum cleaner and followed the boy into the yard.

He heard a slapping sound.

"Squeal. What are you doing?"

"Beating the futons is my job. Do this and the futons will be nice and fluffy!"

Based on his life in Ground's Nir, it was a miracle that Boo Boo could have such lively interactions with people.

"I wonder if you'd get nice and fluffy if I hung you up to dry."

"S-stop that. I wouldn't make tasty jerky. You wouldn't get any

concentrated flavor!”

This world seemed very open to “outsiders”. Beatrice and Misaka Mikoto were not blatantly inhuman, but they could use Magic or fire lightning from their bangs. Nevertheless, they had been readily accepted. Not to mention that the Holy Swordswoman was wearing red miniskirt armor and carried a sword at her hip. Boo Boo was very obviously a Nonhuman and had the family really not noticed the White Queen who gave off such a thick and sweet smell of death? It was entirely possible they had noticed but were ignoring it.

(Phew. Not good. This place started feeling so nice and I forgot why we’re here. This is a death game where we fight the urge to sleep. I’ll be in danger if I get too relaxed.)

Beatrice shook her head all on her own. She felt bad for Haruka and the other maids taking care of the Detached Magic Palace in her absence, but she would not mind staying here for a while.

And as that heartwarming mood came over her, she saw something horrifying.

“Thud. Zzz.”

The Princess had been sleeping by the veranda with her eyes open, but a slender white form tapped her on the shoulder and then she vanished. But that was not her main concern.

“S-squeal…”

She felt like she had been hit by Stun. Boo Boo was falling asleep. He had been helping with the futons hanging out to dry, but his head was drooping as he pulled on the thick cotton.

“B-Boo Boo!?”

Beatrice did not have a moment to spare. Since calling out to him had not worked, her options were incredibly limited.

Two extreme options came to mind:

- Boo Boo is cute, so I could never kick him.
- I must kick him. It’s for his own good.

Time slowed so far it easily surpassed the limits of relativity. She used that infinitely stretched moment to think until she nearly got a nosebleed. In other words, she thought really, really hard.

But Boo Boo's round eyes were more than half closed. When she saw his eyelids rise a little before falling the rest of the way down, the red Holy Swordswoman made up her mind.

(I'm sorry, Boo Boo!!)

She bit her lip hard and ran forward, looking as resolute as she did when risking her life to explore the Labyrinth.

She was the ace striker and he was the soccer ball.

"S-squeeeeeeal!!!???"

Just like a saw wound, a duller blow would only hurt more, but did that really mean it was better to go all out? It was such a clean hit that it almost seemed comical.

She had done the right thing.

If she had not done this, cute little Boo Boo would have been grabbed by the White Queen and throw into that small room.

But.

As Boo Boo flipped upside down and trembled, there was fear in his eyes.

"B-Beatrice… Did I do something wrong? If so, I'll fix it…"

She could not hold back any longer.

She kneeled on the spot, grabbed her dull rapier-shaped Shining Weapon in both hands and pressed it against her navel even though that would not do anything.

"O-ohhhhh!? I-I-I-I'm sorry, Boo Boo. I'll apologize by sending myself straight to hellllllllll!!"

"Squeal! You're being a little too unstable, Beatrice. Don't go around kicking people or dying."

But when he thought about it, he realized she was always like this.

At any rate, she had to reevaluate the situation.

Survival here had nothing to do with life and death. All things would fall asleep when the time came. They might slap their own cheek, press ice against their back, or stuff super spicy food in their mouth, but that was only fighting the symptoms. It would only escalate unless they found a more fundamental solution. And they would eventually hit a limit.

Would they fall asleep or get knocked out by an ally?

A ruinous borderline was coming and those would be their only options.

(There's nothing we can do. We have to break free of this situation.)

And there was only one way of doing that.

Defeat the White Queen.

She knew the answer, but she could not think of an actual method.

But make no mistake about this.

"Here" was not "there".

That might be abstract, but it was the truth. History had proven the White Queen was the absolute pinnacle of existence because that was her world. It was the place where she had killed all possible enemies and built up a "system" that was comfortable for her. But what if she was thrown back into unordered chaos? She had essentially lost the countless pillars that lifted her up and supported her. It was like sending a deadly jellyfish or giant squid after a killer whale or white shark which were the kings of the sea.

It was an unforgivable taboo.

They were impossible odds.

But here they had people from worlds that Beatrice and even the White Queen were unfamiliar with.

That Queen looked like an unscalable cliff, but what if they went after it from the opposite side? That reverse side might be a gentle slope.

So…

(I want to ask Aika about her to learn about her original specs.)

Beatrice was beginning to recover from the shock of the Boo Boo Kick (that she had made).

(But it would be best to compare that to some strange and unfamiliar technology in case we can find a loophole in her almighty power. My money is on that white nun.)

Having a goal was nice.

Having something to do and something to accomplish gave people motivation. The scariest thing was to wander around a nondescript universe without knowing which way was forward and which way was up.

They had already joined forces (by ganging up on Lu Niang Lan as a scapegoat for their flat chested grudges), so Beatrice decided her top priority was discussing this with Index and Misaka Mikoto.

But she had been too naïve.

There was no sign of those two anywhere in the house.

Part 7

(11 Hours After)

It was 10 AM and the puppet show on the educational TV program was amazingly effective at putting people to sleep.

Beatrice wandered around the wide tea room. She stroked her slender chin and thought about the situation.

Index and Misaka Mikoto were nowhere to be found.

"…"

She could think of a few different possibilities.

The first was obviously that they had fallen asleep and fallen victim to the White Queen. There was nothing she could do if that were the case.

But the others were troublesome too.

(Are they setting us up?)

What if they had made it look like they had fallen asleep and vanished but were actually hiding in the attic or below the floor and observing everything? It was possible.

To reiterate, this incident(?) was a championship. Only the final person would survive as the champion. If those two had given up on challenging the unassailable White Queen, they might be waiting in safety for the others to drop out.

Of course, with only one champion, they would have to fight each other in the end if they were working together. But it would allow them to survive until the final battle. If they were hiding, they had no guarantee they would not fall asleep while they waited, so they would want a partner to watch over them.

“What are you doing?”

Beatrice’s shoulders jumped when she heard a voice behind her.

It was Aika, the girl in a white and green striped bikini.

Her presence had nearly vanished when her white liger had been taken from her, but she had suddenly popped back up here.

Yes.

Why had Beatrice’s shoulders jumped instead of feeling relief? There was another possibility.

Only Beatrice, Shinobu, Boo Boo, and Aika remained in the championship.

Index and Mikoto could still be hiding somewhere, but another possibility occurred to Beatrice.

Which of the survivors was most familiar with the White Queen’s hopeless strength? Wouldn’t that be someone from the same world as the White Queen? The Queen seemed to be an old acquaintance of Shiroyama Kyousuke’s and Aika had seemed to know Kyousuke, so the two of them were likely from the same world.

If someone like that felt cornered, would they try to face that enemy head on? Wouldn’t they desperately search for a detour

because they saw that as another dead end?

In other words…

“Don’t tell me…but…don’t tell me…”

“Don’t tell you what?”

“Index and Misaka Mikoto… They might have been the final key. If we worked together and combined multiple occult powers unknown to the White Queen, we might have been able to just barely force her away!!”

“Please explain this one step at a time.”

Aika’s world had already succumbed to the White Queen, so no amount of information about it would help them.

Young Shinobu was from another world, but Beatrice doubted a 6-year-old would be much help.

Beatrice and Boo Boo were from the same world, so she could not hope for a strange chemical reaction or mutation from crossing borders there.

So…what did that mean?

Because Aika had secretly defeated Index and Misaka Mikoto so she alone could survive, were they at a true dead end now!? And that meant Boo Boo and his friend 6-year-old Shinobu would be caught in the middle.

No more questions were needed.

Beatrice could not allow someone so dangerous to approach Boo Boo and young Shinobu behind her.

“What kind of world were you born iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiin!?”

The blank created by Beatrice’s shock was filled with pure rage. She was no saint herself after taking out Armelina with a surprise attack right at the beginning, but the situation was entirely different here. Were they trying to survive by any means necessary or were they working together to overcome it together? Now that things had shifted to the latter, there should have been no reason to mess with things and return it to the former.

But maybe nothing had changed for Aika.

From beginning to end, had she been focused on their utter inability to oppose the White Queen?

Beatrice did not hesitate to draw her Shining Weapon rapier from the sheath at her hip. Without Magic in the form of equipment – that is, Percentage-type stat reinforcements – a single swing of the blade might burn even the girl's bones to ashes, but that did not matter now.

She had to act as quickly as possible.

She had to keep this humanoid risk away from small Boo Boo and Shinobu.

"Metal Jet!!"

The red Holy Swordswoman roared with her arms pulled toward her chest and her sword raised. Several scorching balls of light floated around her. Her commands gave them directionality and they were released with enough force to slice apart a tank one kilometer away.

A total of eight laser-like beams of deadly heat shot out. Unlike the surprise attack to the side of her friend's head, this was an attack from head on, but there was still nothing the swimsuit girl could do.

Or there should not have been.

And yet…

"Wha-!?"

Beatrice's eyes widened even though she had been the one to launch the attack.

It had been bent.

The orange beams of light should have accurately skewered Aika's vitals from multiple angles at once, but just before they reached the defenseless bikini girl, they bent and veered away from her.

That Magic created a kilometers-long version of the metal jet that could burn through the side of a tank when it was a few dozen centimeters or a meter long. No normal method of defense could do anything about it.

After the fact, Beatrice desperately scanned her memory of the event.

(…?)

She noticed that Aika had done something just before it hit. But she had not held up an invisible shield or anything like that. She had dropped an egg-like object toward her feet.

(A grenade? But it didn't look normal. What was it meant to spread?)

"It's true…"

Beatrice heard a voice and something slicing through the air. She noticed a strange 150cm club in Aika's small hand. No, was it even a striking weapon? It looked more like a striped stick of candy with vanilla and mint colors.

"It's true I don't have my vessel without the liger. So no matter how hard I try, I can't even summon the weakest Original Series. That is a fact."

Oh, no, thought Beatrice as her danger instincts were forcibly raised from without. She had assumed Index and Misaka Mikoto had been hit from behind after Aika approached like a friend, but that may not have been the case.

Did Aika have something capable of dealing with those two before they could utter a word?

"Hh!!"

Beatrice let out a short breath and swung her Shining Weapon rapier. Her opponent had some kind of Magical power and clearly intended to harm her. Not to mention young Boo Boo and Shinobu behind her. That was all she needed to know. Her surprise was certainly no reason to relax.

Just like this opponent cared about herself so much, Beatrice cared about someone else.

"Fire Throw!!"

Orange hellfire scattered from the path of her sword with the force of a flash flood erupting from a crack in the world. The previous

attack had used points, but this one used a surface. It could not be avoided so easily.

“But a Blood-Sign is a device meant to point to the gods in written form and give their power and presence a form convenient to humans.”

“Kh.”

“In this Artificial Sacred Ground, nothing could be easier than stealing a miracle that is merely manmade.”

Aika spun the vanilla and mint stick candy in her hand.

That was all.

She did nothing more and yet the wall of fire gathered together like bathwater washing down the drain.

Finally, Beatrice’s memories linked together the events of the initial attack. Aika had dropped something like a grenade at her feet to set up a special “field” and then she had swung her hand through empty air. Something that may have been sugar had glittered. In the blink of an eye, it had melted, lost form, twisted, and formed a single staff.

The summoner whispered while wielding a magic wand.

“You can have this back.”

“Kh!?”

She casually swung the staff with the fire gathered at the end.

And it immediately erupted back toward Beatrice with as much force as she had given it. She had 100% Fire Resistance, so she could completely negate all damage from fire. Without that, she would have been turned to ash, as would Boo Boo and Shinobu behind her.

And it was not over yet.

The flames vanished. No, they were sliced apart. The borrowed fire had only been a smokescreen. Striped Bikini Aika casually stepped forward with the stick candy in hand.

At this range, a solid projectile with lots of recoil would actually be

dangerous.

“Melt Cutting!!”

The rapier blade heated up with an orange light. A light stroke from the scorching blade would melt through a bank vault door and she made a side swing toward the girl’s torso because that was the hardest to dodge.

Aika did not even try to dodge.

However, her martial arts did not hit home either. The vanilla and mint stick candy wandered through the empty air. Beatrice had scored a clean hit, but she had not sliced through Aika’s soft-looking belly.

The reason why was obvious.

Beatrice’s rapier was only a Magic device taking that shape. It did not have a sharp blade attached, so it could only use Magic to cut something.

That meant there was nothing she could do when the Magic at the base was being absorbed. Even Aika’s belly could stop it.

And the Magic had not simply vanished. Aika had taken control of it. The cutting edge capable of breaking into a bank vault was in Aika’s grasp now.

(But my resistance will protect me from my own fire element!!)

Reality moved faster than her thoughts.

The stick candy swung.

It was the opposite of what Beatrice had used. Sharp icicles shot out with the force of a shotgun blast.

“Wha-…?”

(She absorbed the energy form and converted the Magic into a different Element!?)

And that made this an attack outside of her Fire Resistance. She could not negate it in the slightest and it struck her from her chest to her gut.

“Khah!?”

Sparks flew from her light armor. She had trouble breathing and staggered a few steps back. Aika pursued her. She was not overconfident. The girl probably was not that skilled at physical combat, so remaining right in front of her opponent would be best for her.

Beatrice’s legs wobbled more from the shock of being defeated by Magic than from the actual damage. She had dragged her opponent onto her home field and then been made a fool of. Of course that was a shock.

(First the White Queen and now a summoner who says she can summon anything. What kind of world are they from? How bloodthirsty do you have to be to gain that kind of skill!?)

Beatrice clenched her teeth because it was that Magic that made her special. And it was the light armor she wore that received her commands and released it. Once that was taken from her, she was back to being a girl whose life could be taken by a normal sword.

She was helpless once that Magic was stolen. With her paranormal power taken, Beatrice could not defeat Aika who could still use the paranormal.

That was a definite fact.

But could she accept that? After so much fruitless conflict, the survivors had finally decided to work together, but Aika’s surprise attack had sent them back toward conflict as she planned to throw young Shinobu and Boo Boo under the bus to survive. That may have been a logical, effective, and overwhelmingly correct decision, but could Beatrice really use nothing more than that correctness to judge this situation?

She could not.

How could she?

She was not a saint, but after making it this far, she could not let them repeat the foolishness of their starting point. But Aika had done exactly that. And without batting an eye. Beatrice wanted to stop her no matter what.

Beatrice was basically hoping for the impossible, but that was why

a certain possibility occurred to her.

Yes.

Normal people could not use Magic, so what had she done to learn it?

Meanwhile, the situation was not much fun for Aika either. She was a summoner. Even if she had used some tricks to distract her opponent, she normally fought by summoning an otherworldly Material into her vessel's body within the 10-minute Artificial Sacred Ground. On her own, she could not use any sort of paranormal power. This sorceress who constantly wore the paranormal was utterly bizarre to her.

She would make some kind of mistake in a longer battle, but she did not want to carelessly approach either. Charging in earlier had been like jumping into clear water. As long as she did not rush things, she did not need to take that kind of risk again.

(This is why I hate going outside. There's too much I don't know about.)

The shut-in complained in her heart, but that did not stop time.

Aika did not actually have any way of doing real damage. There was not much she could do.

(I can recklessly rush in and invade her personal space to apply pressure and force her to use her Magic like crazy. I can take control of that, convert it into anything but the fire she can negate for some reason, and fire it back. That might be the best plan.)

There were some things one could not avoid even if they knew it was coming. If a baseball flew toward their face, anyone would cover their face with their hands. And they would do the same even if it was a giant dump truck and their hands would accomplish nothing. Their body would move on its own, regardless of logic or effectiveness.

But even if Aika seemed immune to the Magic, that was not an absolute. She was not surrounded by a flame-negating aura like Beatrice was, so she would be burned to ashes if she screwed up her timing. But she could not put her guard up just because it was

frightening. If she did not act like she was fearless, her legs would tremble, she would fail to draw out all of her power, and she would be too slow to avoid death.

Think of it like walking an elevated tightrope. Failing to provide one's peak performance would mean death, but the more they focused on that, the more their anxiety and fear would grow and get in their way. To cross a tightrope with a normal heartrate, they needed a combination of willpower and experience. Anyone who could do that had already taken one step outside the category of amateur.

Aika could do that.

So she did not hesitate to step toward death with her heartrate no higher than while surfing the internet at home.

It frightened her that her opponent could wield the paranormal all on her own, but that reliance on Magic was why this would end here. Direct blows from outside did not seem very effective, so she would use poison or an electric shock to do damage from within. She had tried this twice already, so she already knew the basics of what she needed to do.

In that case, there had been no real reason to tell Beatrice how to avoid it. Giving her opponent a hint would only increase the risk of them finding a solution.

That was why Aika had another form of insurance that was not really a plan.

(Shut-ins are used to staying up late, so don't underestimate my power over sleepiness.)

Aika lived with the ultimate white liger, an unnatural combination of a lion and a white tiger, and she used it as a couch. Felines dozed for around 20 hours a day. No matter how much they trusted each other, the beast could easily wake up without warning and spontaneously attack. It was a common event in circuses. A feline could not be trained like a canine.

She was more sensitive to the waves of sleep than most people. She could even manipulate the liger's emotions and level of consciousness to wrap the liger in a veil of sleep that kept the beast from moving.

In other words…

(This is a strange space where sleeping means death.)

She traced her fingertips across the vanilla and mint stick candy.

(The thought of approaching that Queen sends a chill down my spine, but I can put people to sleep if I want to. If I can defeat you by interfering with your paranormal power, that's one solution. But if I can't, I can mix in a sweet aroma and some visual effects to wear you down mentally and gradually reduce your focus. You're all worked up while utterly exhausted, so you'll fall asleep far more easily than you think. As you work through that excitement, the sugary sweetness will soak its way in. I don't want a longer battle, but it's better than nothing. I'll make my attack with a main goal and a backup goal for insurance!)

She stepped toward danger to attack.

She used that action to awaken her mind and calmly confirmed her goal.

(I'll take her out here.)

She adjusted her grip on her stick candy Blood Sign,

(And I'll take back my own peace.)

But…

A moment later, the Blood-Sign was knocked upwards with enough force for it to bend.

Aika had looked like an absolute barrier, but Beatrice saw a look of disbelief in her eyes now.

That was hardly surprising.

Beatrice had acted entirely differently from before. She had not used Magic to deflect Aika's stick candy upwards. And that was not Beatrice's only weapon.

"How do you think we learn Magic?"

"…Hh…"

Aika quickly spun her stick candy around and tried to adjust her distance from Beatrice, but it was too late. A summoner like Aika specialized in the paranormal, but it had been obvious she was not that skilled in pure physical combat. Her stick candy had not kept up when the rapier had hit her in the side.

“We travel to another world and use a machine to convert that world’s Experience Points into a form we can understand. We can cook a meal to learn to dance or sing a song to increase our marathon-running skill. And the nonexistent techniques known as Magic are the ultimate form of that. But,” whispered Beatrice. “Looking back at that original meaning, there’s no real reason to stick to Magic. I can use all of the Experience Points I earned in this alternate world known as the Jinnai house to instantly master a skill that would normally take years. Yes, for example…”

What was it that had knocked Aika’s stick candy upwards?

“Martial arts using my arms and legs.”

Several sounds of impact followed.

To reiterate, Aika was not very skilled in physical combat that did not involve the paranormal. She could not keep up with Beatrice’s movements that had been improved at the click of a button. Sometimes it was the thick gauntlets, sometimes it was the boots, and sometimes it was the sword’s guard held like brass knuckles. A series of blows from blunt weapons knocked the stick candy further and further back. In fact, this boundless skill would eventually surpass even Lu Niang Lan the Perfect Dragon.

Whether it was an association from the vanilla and mint striped stick candy or the girl was actually scattering something, Beatrice detected a sweet aroma, but she relied on her 100% Fire Resistance as she nullified any effects with extreme heat. A napalm bombing was one way of decontaminating most poison gases or biological weapons.

With its effects gone, it would either lose its chance to cause a problem or it would be knocked too far away to immediately matter.

She did not have to wait and find out.

She had more than just martial arts. Aika was unable to use her stick candy properly and her body was defenselessly exposed, so her

normal methods would work.

In other words, Magic.

“Shockwave.”

“…!?”

After that whispered word, Aika’s eyes really did fill with shock and fear.

A moment later, heavy pressure stabbed into the bright belly exposed by her swimsuit.

Instead of flames or heat, this attack used the shockwave created by an explosion.

But it was powerful enough to bend a locked steel door and destroy the thick lock. That explosive master key would provide greater pressure than a martial artist’s foot.

Aika was blown away and rolled across the dirt ground. The vanilla and mint striped stick candy left her small hand. Finally, Beatrice felt like she had settled things for the time being.

And Aika forced out some words from the ground. Her voice was weak and it sounded like her consciousness was flashing in and out.

“…You…”

Her unstable voice was hard to make out.

But it managed to convey a certain meaning.

“…You…monster…”

Beatrice did not know what that meant.

But then something white passed by her. It was a mass of long ribbons. They wrapped around Aika’s arms and legs since the blow to her gut had knocked her out and they lifted up her slender body like a fish on a fishing pole. She was then dragged over Beatrice’s head and away.

“…”

She was there.

The Queen who ruled over the color white was behind Beatrice. Beatrice did not know what was happening there, but turning around would lead to nothing good. The answer would only bring regret. She held her Shining Weapon rapier in hand and felt her fingers trembling irregularly.

Why had Aika said that?

Why had she looked at Beatrice and called her a monster?

"Don't tell you what?"

When she had first heard that, she had assumed the girl was feigning ignorance.

"Please explain this one step at a time."

But what if it had been an honest question? What if she had not known what had happened to Index and Misaka Mikoto?

Had Beatrice been fighting from a position that protected the White Queen? Had Aika had nothing to do with Index and Misaka Mikoto's disappearance? Had there been no dark conspiracy? Had they simply run across the White Queen by pure chance, or had they simply given into their weariness?

That would mean Aika had done nothing wrong.

That was a major problem, but Beatrice was faced with something that dwarfed it in importance.

What direction had that whiteness come from?

Behind her.

Which two people had been there before? And if the White Queen was standing there, what had happened to them?

What had Aika said?

What if she had actually attacked Beatrice in order to stop what was going on behind her?

Then getting in her way had allowed it to happen and that was why Aika had called her a monster. And for some circumstantial evidence to back it up…

“Boo…Boo…?”

She called his name, but received no response.

Unable to bear the silence, she turned around despite the danger. She could not wait another second. She wanted to know if they were safe.

And…

She saw no sign of Boo Boo’s round stuffed animal form or young Shinobu who had become his friend. Only one person stood in the yard there.

It was the color white.

Part 8

(11 Hours 30 Minutes After)

There was no one left, not even Boo Boo or young Shinobu. She doubted the normal members of the Jinnai family would be much help.

Beatrice faced the White Queen alone.

She could never defeat this opponent. Avoiding her anger was the best course of action and earning her wrath would shorten her lifespan considerably. That overwhelming calamity was more dangerous than an asteroid that would flood entire continents or trigger a global ice age.

“…”

Beatrice clenched her teeth. It pained her that she had used up all of the Experience Points from the Jinnai house for her battle against Aika. That prevented her from learning any new Magic. Not that she was aware of any Magic that could harm that great Queen.

“Oh, dear.”

The White Queen had been toying with the futon beater like she

was bored, but then she looked at Beatrice like the girl was a weed growing on the side of the road. That killed the idea that there had been any special meaning in Beatrice surviving to the end. By some kind of coincidence, she had simply slipped into the calamity's blind spot. But that did not mean she had overcome it by her own power.

"You there, do you know where my brother got off to?"

"…"

Beatrice was unsure what to say. A few options came to mind and she chose one.

"Last night, you dragged him into the forbidden room in your sleep."

"Oh, dear. Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear. Silly me! I let my beloved see how poor a sleeper I am. That was very inappropriate of me."

The Queen giggled happily, but that was all. She showed no sign of attacking. It felt like she would end the conversation and leave at this rate.

It had likely been pure coincidence, but Beatrice was the participant who had survived to the end. Nevertheless, the White Queen had no interest in her whatsoever. With what color did the world in her eyes glow?

Beatrice cautiously raised her Shining Weapon rapier, but it scared her how unreliable it felt. She felt like everything she had built up had been rejected wholesale.

For one thing, Aika was a human from the Queen's world and she had taken complete control of Beatrice's Magic. If this was a being that lurked beyond the gods, just how far could she break the rules? She was a frightening mass of unknowns. This was not the known fear of a knife tip held up to her face. It was the unknown fear of peering into a seemingly bottomless well.

Beatrice did her best to keep her voice from trembling.

"Aren't we…going to do this?"

"I see no reason to."

Unlike the Holy Swordswoman, the Queen's tone was calm and entirely natural.

"I was willing to follow some child's rules to have a wonderful time playing with my brother, but he is no longer here and the survival game is over. Congratulations, Beatrice. You have won the 1st Sleepless Championship. Clap, clap, clap, clap. …So? Do you really want to challenge the hellish hidden dungeon now? For no reason???"

For an instant – just an instant – Beatrice's weak heart was nearly swept toward the easiest answer. She could not deny that.

"Even if you have no reason to…"

But she stopped herself.

She used all of her strength to support her heart.

"I have plenty of reasons to fight! What happened to the others? What happened to Boo Boo who was laughing here a bit ago!?"

"Oh, dear."

The White Queen slowly tilted her head while spinning the futon beater in her hand.

And she spoke.

"You really want to know something so cruel?"

"…!!!???"

She spoke like she was pointing at some disturbed dirt in the dark mountains, so Beatrice's entire body boiled over.

She was surrounded by the ominous sound of flames consuming oxygen, but the Queen was unfazed. A campfire on the surface could trigger a forest fire if handled improperly, but a great conflagration on the surface would not affect the shining sun.

"First of all, I was only following that child's rules to play with my beloved brother, but I will give you some information as a reward for surviving to the end."

"…?"

“Even if you could defeat me, what would you do afterwards? More specifically, how would you return to your original world?”

Beatrice was overcome by something other than standard fear.

It was the overwhelming loneliness of having her lifeline slowly severed during a spacewalk out in the vast, vast expanse of outer space.

The White Queen cheerfully raised her index finger and winked.

“And this might look like a second point, but it’s actually highly related. Where exactly do you think your vanished friends are? Oh, dear. Surely you don’t think they’re actually within the walls of the forbidden room?”

“You don’t mean…”

“I have no reason to pursue you. You are the one with a reason to pursue me. I am acting as the gatekeeper of the alternate space filling the Jinnai house’s forbidden room. Only when I open the door and drag someone through it does the forbidden room act as the forbidden room. Which. Means.” The White Queen exaggerated the movements of her soft lips. “If you want to get back home, you need me to throw you into the forbidden room. That is what I’m saying☆”

Beatrice did not even have enough saliva left to gulp. Her throat was entirely dry.

This was the ultimate choice.

It was of course possible the White Queen was lying. In fact, that was far more likely. If a strange man placed a handgun on the table and said it was the passport to whatever dream you wanted to experience, who would actually stick the barrel in their mouth and pull the trigger? No one. No one at all. When it was that blatant, it would be stupid to believe it.

But it was true she did not know how she would return after defeating the White Queen.

Not to mention that she felt the initial step of overcoming this situation and defeating the White Queen was impossible in and of itself.

“You have three options,” whispered the White Queen. “You can clash with your powerful guide and be destroyed, you can kill the powerful guide yourself and wander forevermore, or you can let the powerful guide show you the way. Everyone else has returned to their respective homes, so I see no reason for you alone to continue struggling.”

She would not know the answer until she tried it.

It was the worst possible riddle, but Beatrice saw one piece of hope.

“Then why did you attack the Zashiki Warashi and Jinnai Shinobu when they lived here to begin with?”

“Oh, dear.”

“If they were all sent home, then those two should have ended up right back here. But they didn’t. There’s a flaw in your claim.”

Beatrice lightly swung her Shining Weapon rapier and held it at the ready.

“So I’ll go with Option 4: Defeat the powerful guide and get her to tell me how to get back home!”

Part 9

(11 Hours 40 Minutes After)

She had declared war.

But Beatrice had almost no cards in her deck. She was a Holy Swordswoman who knew around 14,000 types of fire Magic, but she doubted any combination of those could even scratch this white calamity. Unlike with Aika, this opponent would not use a trick to divert her Magic. She would probably deflect it with pure durability.

Everything about this was painful. Everything in the world seemed to be blessing the Queen. If they had all teamed up from the very beginning and used the secret techniques of several worlds, they might have been able to strike back against the White Queen. The

worst part was that Beatrice had been one of those actively tearing apart any possible teamwork. She had done it twice: at the very beginning and at the very end. She could not complain about anyone else's actions.

And…

Now that she thought about it, the White Queen would not have taken even a second to wipe out every last one of them except for her beloved Shiroyama Kyousuke.

Her beautiful and sinister slender hand pierced mercilessly through the center of the red Holy Swordswoman's chest.

It took just one attack.

Beatrice could not figure out what had happened. How had this broken through the reinforcements of her Percentage-type Magic that took the form of her equipment? The Queen had to have approached right in front of her, so why had she not seen it at all? She was pierced through the chest and out the back, so why was her sense of pain slow to catch up like she had been charmed by the sight? Yes, it had all left the realm of a normal battle. It was abnormal. The Queen herself was, but if any human could clash with her head-on, then they would have to be completely broken as well.

The fact that her rapier was still clutched in her hand almost made her laugh.

But no matter how badly her senses were screwed up, actual time continued to flow without mercy. With her chest pierced down the middle, her life would only last a few dozen more seconds. There was no coming back from this one. If the White Queen had been telling the truth, she would be returned to her world when she was thrown into the forbidden room. Otherwise, she would die here. No, there would be no saving her if she was returned home with a hole through her chest. Either way, the White Queen would escape beyond reach without receiving even a scratch in return.

There was no Magic she could use.

She had no Experience Points to spend.

Boo Boo and the others had already been defeated, but she could only wait for it to end.

But was that really true?

Beatrice, you're in the process of experiencing something no one else can.

For example, death was something that came to everyone equally, but not many people could effectively use that experience in that final moment.

For example, the White Queen's power might reach the entire world, but not many people had fallen directly into her grasp.

Beatrice was experiencing exactly that.

Even if she was defeated and killed, and even if she had simply been toyed with by this ultimate foe…

Wasn't that the ultimate source of Experience Points which could be spent on anything?

"…Ah…"

She even forgot to cough up blood as strength returned to her muddy eyes.

She might be able to pull it off.

She did not know if she could defeat the White Queen. If the Queen was lying, this would all be over. But what if she had not cared enough about Beatrice to bother lying? And it obviously hinged on that technique actually existing.

It was not a form of Magic that Beatrice was familiar with. It was a system from another world. Normally thinking, she would have much more difficulty with this, like trying to learn to ride a unicycle as an adult.

But that did not matter right now.

She could learn the greatest secret technique at the click of a button. With the jackpot of Experience Points won by being personally killed by the White Queen, she could instantly prepare the environment needed to learn any technique.

And on the verge of death, Beatrice reached for that technique.

"I choose to…believe."

“Hm?”

“You are frighteningly evil, but I choose to believe in your evilly great strength and your unlimited ability.”

The Jinnai house’s forbidden room had become the gate to another world and she took the administrative privileges for herself.

A powerful pressure appeared. It took the form of an invisible wind and it came from that hidden room.

“…Oh, dear.”

The White Queen pulled her slender arm from her poor victim’s chest and tossed her aside. She sensed the presence of someone who should have vanished. Several someones. They approached despite their many wounds and one of them had to be the boy the Queen so loved. That alone set her heart racing. She could barely contain herself.

“That was a nice job right at the very end there. You gave me what I truly wanted, but why?”

As Beatrice had imagined, the secret techniques of multiple worlds were there. As were the people with the minds and bodies needed to use them to their fullest.

The White Queen may have been the strongest in one world, but for this one moment, things were less certain.

But the White Queen was entirely focused on the reunion with her beloved. Nothing else even earned a glance.

“In his world, falling asleep means death.”

She had the entranced look of a girl wondering what kind of lunch to make for her crush.

“So embracing him, patting his head, and singing him a lullaby would make for an excellent attack. Kyah☆ I was right to go along with this child’s game!!”

With that, the second battle began.

The White Queen was drowning in a happiness that did not care if she had to stab her beloved or if she was soaked in her own blood in retaliation. She simply enjoyed the moment to its fullest.

Part 10

(12 Hours After)

White Witch Filinion specialized in healing, so her recovery potion was enough to heal Beatrice. That reminded Beatrice of the time she had relied on that healing to break through some gunfire even when a sniper bullet pierced her chest.

“Let’s not be so optimistic, Beatrice. Not even changing history would save you from that Queen’s attack. This only worked because I happened to have some super rare Mixing materials that worked on your personal symptoms.” The glasses woman started saying some ominous things. “Still, I’m amazed I could use this to heal you. It’s like changing the base of some gin and tonic to make vodka and tonic.”

Come to think of it, isn’t she a college student in real life? belatedly recalled Beatrice. The Holy Swordswoman did not quite understand the comparison. Using strawberry milk and matcha milk would have worked better.

“Hey, cow, what did you make me swallow!?”

“Eh heh. Let’s just say it was something ultra miracle rare that could only be found in that intense battle.”

Beatrice frantically got up, but she was no longer in the strangely nostalgic Jinnai home. She saw the normal field of Ground’s Nir.

(We’re…back.)

Filinion had used ingredients she could normally never get her hands on to create a special recovery potion. That had saved Beatrice from the fist-sized hole in her chest. From the look of things, she had no wound to speak of.

“Filinion.”

But if so…

“Did we…win?”

Filinion laughed quietly at that hesitant question. Beatrice knew the

obvious answer. They could not have convinced that Queen to let them go with a plea to her conscience. Since they had returned alive, they must have forced a conclusion against her will.

“There are two possibilities.”

But Filinion did not give a clear answer. She gave a more indirect answer as if teasing frightened Beatrice.

“First, we joined forces, drove back the White Queen, and stole the ingredients for the recovery potion.”

Then what was the other one?

Some slight cruelty seeped into White Witch Filinion’s voice. The way she spoke subtly changed.

Yes, the color white spoke.

“Second, you were all defeated and are enjoying a nice dream together. Now, which do you find more realistic?”

Fin

Kamijou-san, Two Idiots, Jinnai Shinobu, Gray Pig, and Freedom Award 903, Listen Up! …Fall Asleep and You Die, But Not From the Cold☆

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